

The Builder.

NO. LXIV.

SATURDAY, APRIL 27, 1844.



UNITING the several detached portions of the important parliamentary document which

we have given in our last three numbers, our readers will have a pretty correct idea of the state of the great towns in general throughout the kingdom, and will become quite adept on the subject, by adding to the information already acquired, the rest of the

Report of the Select Committee appointed to Inquire into the Circumstances affecting the Health of the Inhabitants of Large Towns and Populous Districts, &c.

Similar or worse accounts are given of various other districts, detailing the evils arising from houses built in close courts, often back to back, frequently with no thorough draught of air, without any conveniences for cleanliness or decency, with no effective drainage, inspection, or system of paving or cleansing.

The general conclusion of the Town Council is: "That the greater part of the town is in a most filthy condition, which demands an immediate remedy, a remedy which does not seem attainable under any local Act now existing, but calls for an especial enactment, which is doubtless required (they say) not only by Leeds, but more or less by every town in the empire."

After referring to the evils constantly arising from the bad construction and position of their dwellings, the witness is asked: "Would it not then be of the first consequence to the welfare of the working classes, that there should be some general regulation laid down, either in a general Building Act or some Act generally applicable, not for interfering with the ordinary construction of houses, but for preventing their being built in such a form and manner as experience has shewn is highly detrimental to the health of the poorer inhabitants?"—"To which Dr. Williamson replies: "The working classes are now exposed to the cupidity and defective arrangements of their landlords, and they appear to me to require the protection of some such general enactment to remedy the evils." The necessity and practicability of such a remedy is spoken to by several other witnesses and experienced builders.

The witness having stated that Leeds had doubled its population within 30 years, is asked, "During that time it appears from the report which you have confirmed, that no due provision and regulation has been made with respect to drainage, sewerage, and cleansing, ventilation, and building, and for the supply of water for this vast community?—Certainly not." And the witness then expresses his opinion of the necessity of legislative assistance.

Your committee have inquired into the state of several other densely-peopled towns, and refer to the evidence given respecting them, not thinking it necessary to enter into detail more than by stating, that they all appear to stand in need, more or less, of measures calculated to enforce sanitary regulations for the benefit of the humbler classes.

Your committee are, however, happy to remark, that the great town of Birmingham, inhabited by so many industrious mechanics,

so long celebrated for their skill and ingenuity, appears to form rather a favourable contrast, in several particulars, with the state of other large towns.

The nature of the employment generally appears not injurious to health; the general custom of each family living in a separate dwelling is conducive to comfort and cleanliness; and the good site of the town, and the dry and absorbent nature of the soil, are very great natural advantages. Still there are many regulations of great consequence to the health and comfort of the inhabitants, which appear neglected, to some of which your committee will advert in the remedies they recommend. Some sanitary regulations respecting the common lodging-houses appear absolutely necessary for the safety of the community.

In addition to their inquiry into the state of many of the large towns of England, your committee also directed their attention to the condition of Dublin and Glasgow. With respect to the former, although many improvements may be made, and additional sanitary regulations are absolutely necessary, they do not think it necessary to do more than direct attention to the able evidence of Dr. Maunsell respecting it, containing many valuable suggestions.

With regard to Glasgow, however, they are sorry to observe that the details are of a most melancholy and afflicting nature. An intelligent witness, who has had every means of knowledge, states, "that penury, dirt, misery, drunkenness, disease, and crime culminate in Glasgow to a pitch unparalleled in Great Britain." And in another place, "I did not believe, until I visited the woods of Glasgow, that so large an amount of filth, crime, misery, and disease existed in one spot in any civilized country."

The witness was accompanied by the magistrates and heads of the police, and describes the want of ventilation, sewerage, cleansing, and attention to the health of the poorer inhabitants in the lower parts of the town, as most grievous in its effects. The result is summed up in the following terms:—"Such being the state of things in large districts of Glasgow, it is not surprising that the number of persons who died last year was 10,270, being at the rate of one in 24, to the whole population, or that out of that number 2,180 died of typhus fever, which never leaves Glasgow." These melancholy details, which can scarcely be read without shuddering, are amply confirmed by Dr. Cowan, a physician resident in the town, whose work, called "Vital Statistics," has been laid before your committee, and its general accuracy proved. It is there stated, and confirmed in evidence, that the rate of mortality in Glasgow has increased most rapidly, and is thus given in round numbers: 1821, 1 in 39; 1831, 1 in 30; 1835, 1 in 29; 1838, 1 in 26; thus shewing the frightful increase from 1 in 39 to 1 in 26 in 17 years.

And, again, it is shewn that the mortality in children under ten years of age has risen from 1 in 75 in 1821, to 1 in 48 in 1832. "Fever," it is stated, has been gradually increasing in the city of Glasgow, and its victims constitute within a fraction of 55 out of every 100 patients treated in our hospitals." "This increase has been during a period of great prosperity." The report quoted goes on to say, "We may safely assume that the 12,805 individuals treated in the fever hospitals during the last seven years, all, with few exceptions, depending on their daily labour, and extending the benefit of that labour to others, were out of employment for a period of six weeks."

Dr. Cowan adds, "The mortality bill of 1837 exhibits a rate of mortality inferring an intensity of misery and suffering unequalled in Britain, and not surpassed in any town we are acquainted with on the continent of Europe." Remedial measures are suggested in the following words: "A few thousand pounds judiciously expended in opening up the districts most densely populated, and in other obvious ways, would greatly tend to alleviate the pressure of our heaviest municipal tax, the fever tax."

Your committee would now turn from the melancholy details, a portion of which they have thought it right to insert in their report, and would state generally, that although the main evils complained of, and proved before them, appear to arise from the want of any regulations as to buildings and ventilation, and

the deficiency in sewerage, cleansing, and other sanitary provisions, yet there appears to be some important improvement necessary, referable to especial sources of illness in certain districts, as particularly, lat. The existence of burial-places in the midst of populous neighbourhoods.

2nd, Local nuisances from some noxious business, affecting the health of the vicinity.

3rd, The neglected and dangerous state of low lodging-houses, frequented by a wretched and migratory population, who often carry fever and other disorders into distant districts.

Independent of the physical evils to the working classes arising from the causes before adverted to, your committee are desirous to express the strong opinion they entertain, confirmed by the testimony of many of the witnesses examined, that the dirt, damp, and discomfort so frequently found in and about the habitations of the poorer people in these great towns, has a most pernicious and powerful effect on their moral feelings, induces habits of recklessness and disregard of cleanliness, and all proper pride in personal appearance, and thereby takes away a strong and useful stimulus to industry and exertion.

The wife, hopeless of being able to make his home comfortable to her husband, abandons all endeavours for the purpose; neglect leads to neglect, recrimination follows reproach, and their children are brought up amidst dirt and wretchedness, with the example of constant domestic disputes before them. Nor can it be doubtful to those who trace the effects of such causes, that the humbler classes are often induced or driven by the want of comfort at home, and by the gloomy prospect around them, to have recourse to dram-drinking, the fertile parent of innumerable ills.

Your committee have thus laid before the house an imperfect abstract of the facts proved before them in evidence, shewing the neglect of due sanitary regulations applicable to improve the health and increase the comfort of great bodies of the poorer classes.

They have traced a few of the more prominent evils which appear to spring from this neglect, and have endeavoured to shew the ill effects produced by these causes in degrading the character of their humbler fellow-subjects, in producing crime, disease, and discontent, and in counteracting in great measure (as regards the younger portion of the population) those moral and religious impressions which they might otherwise receive from education, where it is afforded to them.

The cost to the country, arising from these combined causes, it might be difficult to estimate with exactness, but there can be no doubt that it is enormous. Thus it is estimated that every person in the Fever Hospital (12,895 in seven years) in Glasgow loses six weeks employment, which, calculated at 7s. 6d. per week, would amount to 29,004l. lost to the community, besides the cost of attendance and support; this has been calculated, where the patient recovers, at 11s. per case, and adds here 12,895l. to the account of loss; chiefly owing to the want of proper sanitary regulations.

In proportion as the working classes in these great cities (rapidly increasing every year) and their children are injuriously affected in their physical condition and their moral characters by the causes alluded to, just in that proportion will their value to the community be diminished, and their cost to the kingdom increased. The property which the country has in their useful labours will be so far lessened, and the unproductive outlay necessary to maintain and restrain them so far augmented.

This consideration will not be thought beyond the province of your committee, when it is remembered that in the remedies they propose some outlay of expense must necessarily occur; yet, on reflection, it is hoped that they will be justified in the conclusion they have come to, that ultimately a great saving to the community will thereby take place; and even were that not the case, that some such measures are urgently called for, as claims of humanity and justice to great multitudes of our fellow-men, and as necessary not less for the welfare of the poor than the safety of property and the security of the rich.

REMEDIES.

The remedies which your committee would propose in order to carry out the spirit of "Sanitary regulations for the benefit of the health of the inhabitants of the great towns of